

# On the Art of the Nō Drama

The Major Treatises  
of Zeami



*Translated by J. Thomas Rimer and Yamazaki Masakazu*

*Princeton Library of Asian Translations*



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**A modern performance of the ceremonial play *Okina*.**



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an initiate into the “art of the mysterious flower” in which the spirit of the actor and his manifestation of that power are indivisible. Great performers seem to not be working, but just “being.” The blending of form and content is particularly difficult when it comes to the human body performing a play; Zeami is quite sure it can be achieved.

Zeami sounds very much like the modern director when he speaks of “the sensation of mutuality” as essential to an acting company; the highest level of achievement cannot be reached without a strong ensemble, a strong sharing of all those on stage.

Finally, one admires Zeami because of his comments about such matters as performing a bad play: “A bad play that one can yet make something of by taking advantage of its very defects and ‘breaking one’s bones’ in the acting of it.” Is this not the medieval Japanese equivalent of “chewing up the scenery”?

And Zeami is again endearing when he speaks of playing “a bit more forcefully” when the audience is inattentive. He is not opposed to trying out new things in the provinces, perfecting the work before bringing it to the cultural capital: he has had his Boston-New Haven-New York City circuit. But he does not believe in condescending to the less sophisticated audience—one must be able to achieve *hana* with the audience, no matter what the social setting.

This is a valuable, intriguing book. It is a delight to discover that there is nothing new under the theatrical sun, and that so much can be learned from someone who trod the boards six hundred years ago!

Wallace Chappell  
Artistic Director  
The Repertory Theatre  
of St. Louis



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# The Background of Zeami's Treatises

by J. Thomas Rimer



The *nō* theater of Japan, one of the most remarkable performing traditions in world theater, was brought to its first and highest flowering by Zeami Motokiyo (1363-1443). Zeami, building on the insights and experiences of his father Kan'ami, was able through his own skills and abilities to transform what had been essentially a country entertainment with strong ritual overtones into a superb total theatrical experience in which mime, dance, poetry, and song were combined so that each art could be transcended in order to produce for his audiences an experience of profundity and almost religious exhilaration.

Zeami's treatises, in which he discusses the principles of his art, remain unique documents in the history of the *nō*. They stand as crucial statements that can inform a modern reader, just as they were meant to inform Zeami's professional colleagues, of the essential elements in the theatrical process as Zeami understood them. From our twentieth-century point of view, the treatises seem to serve two widely differing functions. On the one hand, Zeami's notions of the interlocking functions of acting, music, and movement in the *nō* reveal a remarkably contemporary consciousness. Despite the poetic and often arcane language Zeami uses, a performer can still find much here that seems altogether appropriate to the craft of acting. My colleague, Mr. Yamazaki concentrates on this aspect of the treatises in his essay. On the other hand, the treatises tell us an enormous amount about the early development of the *nō*, a form of theater profoundly grounded in the specifics of medieval Japanese culture. My purpose here is to suggest enough of the historical background to provide a useful context for an understanding of Zeami's concerns.





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enlightenment or excellence.<sup>3</sup> It is not by accident that the word Path or Way occurs in the titles of several of Zeami's treatises, and it is the concept that ties all of them together.

For all the importance that Zeami places on the need for an inner concentration leading to a fixed goal, a modern reader will be struck again and again by Zeami's fascination with the freedom of the process involved. *Nō* may have grown out of ritual and folk art, but Zeami brought to such traditional assumptions an opportunity for a new and profound originality through his commitment to pleasing his audience, a process that required a judicious use of the traditional and the unexpected. In this sense, the treatises show an almost revolutionary spirit at work. Zeami was willing to set aside canons of traditional taste when the occasion demanded it. In this regard, he goes beyond his mentors in the field of *waka* and *renga*.

The important aesthetic concepts developed by Zeami in the course of these treatises could well form the basis for an extended study. In any case, he explains his ideas in such striking and poetic language that no lengthy preface is required here. At the least, however, it might be well to mention here several key terms as a signal to the reader that these concepts—which usually become more clear when all the treatises are read—are crucial to Zeami's central patterns of thought.

One is that of the Flower (*hana*), a symbol used by Zeami for the true beauty created by the actor's performances in different ways throughout his career. By the use of this natural symbol, Zeami maintains a deep connection between the forces and movements of nature and the work of the committed actor, who in his art must attempt to recreate and symbolize those patterns and relationships. Then too, as Arthur Waley first suggested in his 1921 volume *The Nō Plays of Japan*, the idea of mystic transmission is involved in the concept of the Flower. The alternate title of the *Fūshikaden* (which we have

<sup>3</sup> See Brower and Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry*, p. 257. For a full discussion of the concept of *michi* in medieval Japanese aesthetics, see Konishi Jin'ichi, *Michi—chūsei no rinen* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1975).

rendered as *Teachings on Style and the Flower*) is the *Kaden-sho*, which might be literally translated as "The Book for the Transmission of the Flower," perhaps a reference to the mysterious transfer of thought from the Buddha to his disciple Kāśyapa, an incident mentioned in the treatises by Zeami himself. It is doubtless for this reason that Zeami often observes in the course of the treatises that some particular point cannot be explained in words alone but requires an intuitive understanding on the part of the actor.

Another concept crucial to Zeami's thought is that of a fundamental rhythm basic to the *nō*, and, as he points out on several occasions, to all of nature itself. Zeami categorizes this basic rhythmical movement as *jo* (introduction), *ha* (breaking), and *kyū* (rapid), a gradual increase of pace from slow to fast. Scholars have identified various sources for this concept that go back as far as the patternings for the *bugaku* dances imported into Japan from China in the Heian period (794-1185). Zeami, however, seems to have been the first to use such a rhythmic pattern as a metaphor for the deepest psychological movement inherent in a successful theatrical experience.

Another powerful idea in Zeami's treatises concerns the relationship of *yūgen*, which we have translated as Grace, with the concept of *monomane*, sometimes translated as imitation but rendered in our translation by the term Role Playing so as to avoid too strict a suggestion of Western *mimesis*. A number of the most striking passages in the treatises deal with a need to create in the spectators a sense of the beauty that lies behind and beyond the kind of surface portrayal possible through the creation by the actor of any mere outward verisimilitude of the character being portrayed.

In addition to Zeami's own concepts, these treatises also provide for the student of comparative theater history or of Japanese medieval culture an enormous amount of fascinating specific information, often presented in a vivid fashion, of artistic life during Zeami's lifetime. Although it is true that methods of performing the *nō* established at that period still



continue, the kind of stately experience usually offered today seems at some variance with the rough-and-tumble world described in the treatises. Zeami's milieu involved constant competition, and he always remained anxious to make his troupe successful and to keep it so. He has praise for others, but he shows himself as well an astute critic of performers from rival groups; and, indeed, his comments are so shrewd that, although the particulars of the acting styles are no longer always clear to us, the general import of his remarks always remains precise and vivid.

Four of the major troupes that perform today can trace their lineage back to the time of Zeami (see chart 1). The fifth troupe now performing, usually referred to as the Kita school, was formed in 1618 by a gifted amateur actor, Shichidayū (1586-1653), who received special patronage from the all-powerful Tokugawa family. From this time on, official support for the *nō* from the Tokugawa Shōguns helped remove this form of drama from the public scene and brought about as well a standardization, an increased emphasis on elegance, and a slower pace to performances. The *nō* that we witness today has been filtered through the Tokugawa process of gentrification, with both gains and losses.

One important change during the early Tokugawa period involved the establishment of fixed dimensions for the *nō* stage. The treatises make clear, however, that actors during Zeami's lifetime were quite prepared to perform in a variety of playing spaces; indeed, one test of their skill as performers concerned their abilities to adjust their movements and vocal production to a variety of environments. Evidently there was no regularized playing space during Zeami's lifetime, or at least there is no information remaining that allows us to describe such a place with confidence. Figure 1 is a modern rendering of the kind of space used for performances in front of the Shōgun, and so might be considered as somewhat typical.

The treatises also reveal that the method by which the plays were chosen for performance was somewhat at variance with

Chart 1 Various Important Troupes Performing at Zeami's Time

	Dengaku		Yamato Sarugaku				Ōmi Sarugaku			Hosshōji Sarugaku		
Troupes [alternate names]	Honza	Shinza	Yūzaki [Kanze]	Tobi [Hōshō]	Sakado [Kongō]	Emman-i [Takeda]	Yamashina	Shimozaka	Hie	Shinza [Enami]	Honza [Yata]	Shuku
Actors	Itchū ↓	Hanayasha Kiami Zoami ↓	Kan'ami Zeami On'ami			Zenchiku			Dōami Iwatō ↓	Enami ↓		
	DIES OUT										DIES OUT	
Later Troupe Names			Kanze	Hōshō	Kongō (divides in 17th century into Kongō, Kita)	Komparu						





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remain quite unknown to modern Japanese or Western readers. Many of these submerged works deal with themes and figures from Shintō myth and legend, pointing to an aspect of ritual and belief that is much less visible in the better-known and often elegant plays based on Buddhist themes. The treatises suggest that the psychological attitudes of Zeami and his contemporaries, for all the affinities we may feel, show strong qualities that are foreign to a modern mentality, Japanese or Western. There remains something rich and strange about Zeami and his world. Working over the treatises, it has seemed to me that, whatever we gained in the centuries since his death, we have lost something as well—a quality perhaps best expressed in that awe Zeami felt before the processes of nature and art, an awe that for him was a necessary prelude to individual creation. If our translations can suggest in some fashion the importance of that awe to Zeami, and perhaps its potential value to us, then Mr. Yamazaki and I will be gratified indeed.

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# The Aesthetics of Ambiguity: *The Artistic Theories of Zeami*

by Yamazaki Masakazu



When compared with the other views of the theater in the world, particularly with various dramatic theories of the West, Zeami's artistic theory clearly demonstrates three major characteristics. First, Zeami attached great importance to the audience that witnessed a performance; second, he laid a particular emphasis on the actor's mental and physical acting among the diverse elements that constitute the theater; third, he gave a high place to stylization in acting.

When speaking of classical dramatic theories of the West, one would cite Aristotle's *Poetics* as the first comprehensive attempt; but in an almost symbolic fashion, this first dramatic theory in the world almost completely lacks reference to the three elements mentioned above. This work by Aristotle is, first of all, a theory of the creation of the drama (as its title in Greek, ΠΕΡΙ ΠΟΙΗΤΙΚΗΣ, shows) and analyzes its structure. Although the author describes precisely and thoroughly how a play should be written, he does not go at all into how the play will be acted or seen by the audience. Aristotle compares literary works, including the drama, with historical narratives, or analyzes art in relation to reality, but he never looks into the relationship between creation and appreciation, or between the work and the audience. One can even say that the very fact the audience does affect the production of art in various subtle ways, and does participate actively in making the theater what it is, was not present in his mind.

Needless to say, according to Aristotle, the essence of the theater is the imitation of action in the form of action, and



here the definition “in the form of action,” is merely set against the idea of “in the form of narration.” In other words, the philosopher is saying that when writing a play the dramatist should not portray his characters from the outside in the fashion of an epic poet, but should enter into them and look at the world from their viewpoints. Within this framework, Aristotle does not completely ignore the importance of acting. In Chapter 17, he even demands of the dramatist a kind of empathic acting.<sup>1</sup> Aristotle insisted that a man who is himself feeling real sorrow and real rage can express such emotions convincingly and make his audience believe in them effectively. However, this view concerned only the internal acting by the dramatist; Aristotle’s demand did not extend to the imitation of action by a real actor making use of his voice and body. If the actor’s body movements or voice production is considered in Aristotle’s theory of the drama at all, it is only in connection with the aural or visual effects of the performance, and even as such, it is subsidiary to references to the plot, characterization, thought, or diction, and is clearly given a peripheral position.<sup>2</sup>

One may say that in the *Poetics* the performance of a play itself is a secondary subject; and if that is so, it is natural that questions of stylization in acting or directing are not seriously considered.

Aristotle was apparently a realist of a sort in his view of internal acting by the dramatist, and seems to have thought

<sup>1</sup> “Again, the poet should work out his play, to the best of his power, with appropriate gestures; for those who feel emotion are most convincing through natural sympathy with the characters they represent; and one who is agitated storms, one who is angry rages, with the most life-like reality.” S. M. Butcher, trans., *Aristotle’s Theory of Poetry and Fine Art* (New York: Dover, 1951), pp. 61-62.

<sup>2</sup> “The spectacle has, indeed, an emotional attraction of its own, but, of all the parts, it is the least artistic, and connected least with the art of poetry. For the power of tragedy, we may be sure, is felt even apart from representation and actors.” Butcher, *Aristotle*, p. 29. “Again, tragedy like epic poetry produces its effect even without action; it reveals its power by mere reading.” Butcher, *Aristotle*, p. 109.



that the only function of acting is to communicate unadulterated emotions precisely. From their characteristics known today, we may deduce that classical Greek tragedies required highly stylized acting, but the fact that such acting was not of aesthetic interest to Aristotle was decisive for the history of dramatic theories of the West.

Later in the Renaissance period, the West saw signs of Aristotelian poetics reviving along with the resurgence of the theater itself, and on that foundation many literary scholars developed their own dramatic theories. The central argument was again on the writing of the drama—its subject matter, construction, or style. Very little attention was given to the techniques of performance.

The only exception was an Italian humanist, Leone de Somi (1527-1592), who turned his eyes to the art of acting in the latter half of the sixteenth century and wrote a discourse called "A Dialogue on Acting." The eighteenth century finally saw some growth in the interest in the theory of acting: Luigi Riccoboni's *On the Art of Declamation*, his son François Riccoboni's *L'Art du théâtre*, and Pierre Rémond de Sainte-Albine's *Le comédien* were published. This led to the writing of the famous *Paradoxe sur le comédien* by Denis de Diderot.<sup>3</sup>

All these, however, were but fragmentary technical discussions on acting that lacked any firm aesthetic foundation. They were interested in some limited aspect of acting. Their only major argument revolved around opposing ideas as to whether acting should be based on real emotions or on intellectual observation that excluded emotion. In one sense it represented a dispute between the Aristotelian theory of acting and the theory that opposed it.

<sup>3</sup> Details concerning these various treatises and translations of important sections from them can be found in various entries in Toby Cole and Helen K. Chinoy, eds., *Actors on Acting* (New York: Crown, 1972). A discussion and evaluation of certain aspects of these treatises from the point of view of a pioneer of the modern theater can be found in chapter 2 of William Archer's *Masks or Faces? A Study in the Psychology of Acting* (London and New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1888).

This conflict was continued into the nineteenth century, when William Archer discussed the choice between two alternatives, masks or faces. Even then, one may conclude that the mainstream of opinion descended from Aristotle's theory of empathy. For example, Stanislavsky's "method" of realistic acting later came to dominate the modern theater worldwide; it, in short, valued the truth of emotion and denied all stylized acting.

This tradition of the denial of stylization goes back many centuries. In existing records of the Roman era, one can see traces of the fact that actors at that time aimed principally to be realistic. According to Aulus Gellius, the actor named Polus was praised for keeping to himself the sorrow he felt at the death of his son and so making a clever use of it in acting the role of Orestes.<sup>4</sup>

The famous lines in Scene 2 of Act III of *Hamlet* are often cited as an indication of Shakespeare's theory of acting, and the idea that actors should hold a mirror up to nature must also be read as a manifesto on realism in a wider sense of the word. It is widely known that French classicists always asked for the pursuit of "naturalness" at the same time as they demanded a recapitulation of the classics in their concept of the theater. On the Shakespearean stage and in the acting of French classics, various types of stylization were actually required, and lines were written in magnificent verse; yet no theoretical attempt was made to affirm that fact in any positive fashion.

Moreover, even in the modern age, when Stanislavsky and his successors took the center stage, the audience was always treated as a subordinate factor in a performance and was never regarded as an essential part of dramatic creation. Ironically, modern dramatic theories were devised rather as an inquiry into the necessary means to allow the actor to forget the audience and make him independent of it. When the proscenium arch came to be an integral part of theaters and

<sup>4</sup> See *Actors on Acting*, pp. 14-15.



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does to him. That is the state the actor reaches when he has completely digested his artistic skills through repeated and thorough training and rehearsals, thus integrating his mind and body so that dramatic effects appear almost automatically or spontaneously. In other words, the actor keeps back from the audience the impression that he is controlling their emotions and takes care not to give the impression of the expansion of his self to the audience.

This emphasis on the audience is characteristic not only of Japanese dramatic theories but of its artistic theories in general. Donald Keene in his *Japanese Literature: An Introduction for Western Readers* quotes Ki no Tsurayuki's preface to the early anthology of court poetry, the *Kokinshū*, and points out that an idea completely opposed to Western aesthetics is recognizable in Tsurayuki's thought. The Japanese poet held that poetry grows out of the human heart, touches it and goes beyond human beings to move even nature and supernatural beings. According to Mr. Keene, Western poetics believe that poetry is born out of the supernatural and moves human beings in the guise of human language.<sup>6</sup> The traditional view of art in the West held that art came into being out of the relations between the artist as an individual and what was called a god or an ideal—in other words, between man and the supernatural. In this context, a work of art was created by a lonely genius outside the common or mundane world; therefore another man's appreciation had only a secondary significance.

From the point of view of this idealistic aestheticism, the value that art must pursue, whether it be beauty or truth, must always be seen as at the end of a one-directional road. Since all realities are but copies of their ideas, the correct appearance of reality is produced by approaching as close as possible to that idea. In classicism, the ideal of beauty was given as an objective canon, whereas romanticism sought to achieve more

<sup>6</sup> See Donald Keene, *Japanese Literature, An Introduction for Western Readers* (New York: Grove Press, 1955), p. 22.



direct and subjective unity with ideas. In either case, the artist was required to pursue a pure and one-dimensional objective at all times.

Needless to say, even in the West attempts were made apart from idealism to see man as an ambiguous being, and to understand reality as a paradoxical world. It is widely known that Socrates was a genius of paradoxes. Shakespeare's plays are studded with lines that portray the ambiguity of man's existence, such as "Fair is foul, foul is fair" at the beginning of *Macbeth*. Nevertheless, the fundamental aesthetics of the West ultimately aim to capture an ideal in its purest form, and have tried to eliminate all that is inconclusive or ambiguous; in other words, an attempt has been made to exclude compromises between the artist and the rest of humanity.

Even in the modern age, when people began to believe that art must portray reality, the basic idealism did not change. Realism allowed no compromise on the part of the actor, and demanded that he portray social injustices and human uglinesses relentlessly. In addition, the Western tradition required that the artist be aloof to his secular surroundings. He was expected to make his art outside the framework of actual human relations.

In the Japanese tradition, by contrast, art almost always stemmed from actual human relations. Take lyric poetry, for instance. *Waka* poems were customarily made at various parties and later specifically at poetry parties, which were a unique form of social gathering. At such a party, a poem was considered completed when it was appreciated and evaluated by those present as soon as it was made. Afterwards this custom developed further and produced the form of *renga* in which a number of persons contributed to create one unified work. In the case of the fine arts, as well, a painting was deemed completed only when it was seen by people at a salon and their impression was inscribed on the picture in the form of a poem. Furthermore, Japan produced a unique form of art, the tea ceremony. The fact that social formalities were height-

ened into art is enough to suggest how the Japanese traditional view of art functioned.

Reflecting such a tradition, Japanese aesthetic thought did not and does not encourage pursuit of any aesthetic ideal in one direction of purification. Rather, to the contrary, all aesthetic effects are believed to become what they are while containing contradictory elements within themselves.

According to Yoshida Kenkō (1283-1350), a noted essayist of the medieval period, a man of good taste should not look directly at anything beautiful, whether it be the moon or a flower. The correct attitude is *yosonagara ni miru*, or to long for it indirectly from some distance.<sup>7</sup> This idea was later succeeded by the aesthetics of *wabi*, according to which anything gorgeous becomes truly beautiful when joined with something subdued, so as to become half concealed by it. One of the originators of the tea ceremony, Murata Shukō (1422-1502), said, "I do not like the moon without clouds." The point of the aesthetics of *wabi* was summed up in the words of Rikyū (1521-1591), the greatest of the tea masters, as "a fine steed tethered in a thatched shack."

In Japanese literature from the Heian to the Edo period, the technique of allusion (*honkadori*) in poetry and of parody (*mojiri*) in fiction were particularly liked, reflecting a taste that valued the duality of imagery—creating, in other words, an aesthetics of paradox.

Whereas a transcendental being essentially represents a single value and never varies its demand, man's existence cannot be separated from his physical senses, and so he cannot endure the pureness of any singular and homogeneous value. However much a man may like brightness, he cannot keep his eyes open in the direct rays of the sun. A man may have a sweet tooth, but if he were forced to keep on taking pure sugar forever, he would find it painful. Man's senses easily become fatigued and bored with any unadulterated object; the only way to keep them satisfied is to change continuously the nature

<sup>7</sup> See *Essays in Idleness*, pp. 115-118.



of the stimulation. Moreover, just as sweetness is enhanced by a small amount of salt or bitterness mixed in with it, it is well known that man's sensitivity is heightened by the addition of an opposing element.

Such observations help us to see that since Japanese art is created not before a transcendental being but by one human being for another, it is natural for its aesthetic ideal to show an essentially paradoxical and ambiguous character. It is also easily understandable how in the thinking of Zeami, who worked face to face with his audiences as an artist in the theater, such an aesthetics of paradox came to rule his thought. For example, he set the concept of Grace (*yūgen*) as the supreme goal of his art, but this idea of beauty, of which sophistication and grace constituted the essence, could not be achieved by pursuing it directly.

Zeami's family, who came originally from the farming district in Iga and who represented the artistic taste of the powerful local clan, was particularly good at acting out stories with many dramatic ups and downs and at presenting various characters in a realistic manner. One can imagine that their original style lay in portraying diverse characters with clearly marked personalities. On the technical side they laid emphasis on descriptive gestures and stage speech. Starting from this base of unsophisticated realism, Zeami achieved an urban refinement of expression. In more specific terms, he developed a style that emphasized song and dance. He called this new form of beauty "grace."

In this sense, from the beginning his idea of Grace presupposed its opposite as the condition for its existence, and it came into being through the unification of reality and idealization, of individuality and refinement, of popular traits and aristocratic taste. When an actor is to play the part of a fierce warrior, for instance, Zeami demands that a trace of Grace be added to the realistic representation of the character. According to his own words, the effect must be "like a flower blooming on a rock." In the portrayal of an old man, while demanding an expression of the decline of strength and of the



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movement of his body, the well-disciplined dynamism of the body itself can move the audience.<sup>8</sup>

In regard to the style of dance in the *nō*, Zeami first defines the two opposing basic forms of Self-Conscious Movement (*shuchi*) and Movement beyond Consciousness (*buchi*), and places above them Mutuality in Balance (*sōkyokuchi*), which comes into being as the unification of the two. Self-Conscious Movement is the style based on the articulated movement of various parts of the body, including the limbs, and Movement beyond Consciousness is born out of the actor's committing his body to the continuous flow of movement itself. In explaining the dance in terms of Movement beyond Consciousness, Zeami likens it to a bird spreading its wings and floating in the air. This static state, which is full of tension, must correspond to the ideal of "the less done the better." For Zeami, this internal tension was always the foundation of acting, and any external and articulated movement was to be added on top of it. Needless to say, the ideal was a perfect balance between the two. Indeed, in regard to the dance, he defined that state specifically as the original style called Mutuality in Balance.

What Zeami stresses in his teachings to actors, however, is none other than "becoming" and the possession of "one mind." He calls the actor who has acquired that ability one who can show Internalization (*yūshufū*). Internalization requires that an actor become the complete master of his own movements, and according to Zeami it denotes a state in which the flow of movement has become so well assimilated that the actor loses even the consciousness of controlling it.

<sup>8</sup> In performances of *nō* as presently staged, it may seem to some members of the audience that the aspect of "becoming" is overemphasized, and that the technique of "the less done the better" is excessively abused by the actors. It is certainly true that throughout the Tokugawa period (1600-1867), efforts were made, under the strong pressure of the Shōguns, to remove the *nō* from the life of the ordinary people and to reduce realistic and expressive acting in order to make the form as aristocratic as possible. Zeami's assertions must be understood in the context of his own historical period.



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balance, and the ambiguous character of the rhythm is destroyed. Acting, as a consequence, will become either imprecise, with the aspect of its fluidity accentuated, or will be reduced to a mechanical and clumsy level, with the aspect of its articulatedness more apparent. In all probability, so long as human civilization swings undecided between utilitarianism and laziness, man's action will always be threatened by both of them, and so will fail to attain a sound and beautiful appearance.

Having discussed this much, it is not necessary any longer to explain why Zeami showed no interest in realism of acting but endeavored to establish a stylized form for it. To this artist, it was song and dance, or the Two Basic Arts, and three basic characters, or Three Role Types, that stylized acting. The reason for this was that they gave action both a stable rhythm and an attitude. To Zeami, a beautiful style meant nothing other than the beautiful attitude for action and the ideal rhythm that all actions should possess. In other words, a style of acting is not a fiction for the stage but a form that all actions should possess in order to attain perfection as action. It is, however, a framework that actions tend to miss in reality. In this sense, if one is to state on Zeami's behalf his tacit and basic understanding, probably one should say that there is no perfect action that one must imitate in this world of reality, and a real action is restored to its ideal state only in stylized acting.



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peated in other forms in the treatises that have been translated in this volume.

Among the most important of the musical treatises written by, or attributed to, Zeami are the following:

(a) *Ongyoku kowadashi kuden* (*Treatise on Musical and Vocal Production*), a short treatise dealing with the vocalization of *nō* texts.

(b) *Fushizuke shidai* (*Treatise on the Application of Melody*), a short treatise on the creation and performance of melodies to be chanted to a *nō* text.

(c) *Fūkyokushū* (*A Collection Concerning Musical Performance*), a brief discussion of methods of performing the *nō* chant.

(d) *Goongyokujōjō* (*Various Matters Concerning the Five Modes of Musical Expression*), the most complete expression by Zeami of his musical ideas on the *nō*.

(e) *Goon* (*The Five Modes*), another statement of the materials discussed at length in the preceding treatise.

2. *Yūgaku geifū goi* (*Five Levels of Performance for the Joy of Art*). A brief treatise, in classical Chinese, that distinguishes five different styles of excellence in performance.

3. *Rikugi* (*Six Principles*). A brief treatise attributed to Zeami that relates the art of *waka* to the *nō*. Some scholars cite the somewhat arbitrary nature of the text as an indication that Zeami may not have been its author.

4. *Nikkyoku santai zu* (*Illustrations for the Two Basic Arts and Three Role Types*). A brief illustrated treatise. The material presented is basically the same as that in *The True Path of the Flower* and in *Finding Gems and Gaining the Flower*. There is a French translation in Sieffert's *La Tradition secrète du nō*.

5. A group of miscellaneous writings that are not, strictly speaking, treatises on the art of the *nō*. Among them are the following:



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**Figure 6. A demon whose movements are in the Rough Style, which Zeami did not consider appropriate for his school of performance**

**Figure 7. The role of an Old Man, "Relaxed Heart, Looking Afar"**

**Figure 8. The role of a Woman, "Concentration of Mind, Relinquishing Physical Strength"**



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—Sensual pleasures, gambling, heavy drinking represent the Three Prohibitions. Such was the precept of my late father.

—Rehearse with the greatest effort; do not be overbearing with others.

## CHAPTER 1. ITEMS CONCERNING THE PRACTICE OF THE NŌ IN RELATION TO THE AGE OF THE ACTOR

### *Age Seven*

It may be said of our art that one may begin at seven.<sup>2</sup> When a boy practices at this age, he will naturally of his own accord show some elements of beauty in what he does. If, by chance, he should show some special skill in dancing, movement, chanting, or in the kind of powerful gestures required for demon roles, he should be left free to perform them in his own manner, according to his own desires. He should certainly not be instructed as to what he did well and what he did poorly. If rehearsals are too strict, and if the child is admonished too much, he will lose his enthusiasm. If the *nō* becomes unpleasant for him, then his progress will cease. He should only be taught dancing, movement, and the chant. In particular, he should not be instructed in the fine points of Role Playing, even though he may show aptitude for it. He must not be permitted to perform in a *waki sarugaku*, especially on an open stage. Let him perform at a time that seems appropriate, in the third or fourth play in the day's program, when he can be given a part he can perform with skill.

### *Age of Eleven or Twelve*

From this age onward, the voice begins to achieve its proper pitch, and the actor can begin to comprehend the *nō*. There-

<sup>2</sup> Traditionally, ages were calculated so that a person was considered one year old at birth and two at the beginning of the next calendar year. Thus the ages given here are higher than would have been assigned to a Western actor at the same stage of development. Thus Zeami's actor at the age of seventeen or eighteen would probably be, by Western reckoning, between fourteen and sixteen.



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actor is on the rise until he is thirty-four or thirty-five, and he begins to decline after forty. This fact cannot be repeated too often—those who do not achieve a reputation at this stage of their career have not actually mastered the art of the *nō*. Therefore it is in this period that the actor must perfect his self-discipline. At this time in his career, he can recall all that he has learned; it is also the moment when he is able to plan for the means to accomplish what he wishes to in the future. If such things are not mastered at this age, then, let me repeat again, it will be difficult for an actor to find success with audiences later in his career.

#### *Forty-four, Forty-five Years*

From this point on, the actor must find new means of showing his skills. Even if he has achieved a fine reputation and has mastered the art of the *nō*, he must be able in turn to have in his troupe young actors who will follow him. Although his real art may not decline, yet, as his years advance, his physical presence and the beauty others find in him will be diminished. Leaving aside the exceptionally handsome performer, even a fairly good-looking actor, as he grows older, should no longer be seen playing roles that do not require a mask. Thus this former aspect of his art will now be lacking. From this point onward, it is best not to perform elaborate parts. On the whole, an actor should choose roles that are congenial to him and that can be played in a relaxed manner without physical strain. He should allow the younger actors to show off their own abilities, and he should play with them in a modest fashion, as an associate. Even if he has no young successor of a suitable caliber, an actor should not himself perform any highly complicated and strenuous roles. In any case, the audience will find no Flower in this sort of performance. If, on the other hand, an actor has not lost his Flower by this age, then it will remain truly his possession. If an actor still possesses his Flower as he approaches fifty, then he must have achieved a real reputation before the age of forty. Even an actor who has



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spectators to be deceived and to make a false judgment too quickly concerning the performer's talents. But to play the part of an old man of high rank whose gestures involve no characteristic movement is truly difficult and requires the skills of a master actor. Unless an actor rehearses over the years until his art is at its peak, he cannot properly present this kind of role. Without a proper Flower, such a restrained performance can have nothing of interest about it.

In terms of stage deportment, most actors, thinking to appear old, bend their loins and hips, shrink their bodies, lose their Flower, and give a withered, uninteresting performance. Thus there is little that is attractive in what such actors do. It is particularly important that the actor refrain from performing in a limp or weak manner, but bear himself with grace and dignity. Most crucial of all is the dancing posture chosen for the role of an old man. One must study assiduously the precept: portray an old man while still possessing the Flower. The results should resemble an old tree that puts forth flowers.

### *Performing without a Mask*

This too represents an important aspect of our art. As such roles are those representing ordinary persons, they may seem to be easy to perform, but, surprisingly, unless the highest level of skill in the *nō* is used, such a performance will not be worth watching. The actor must of necessity study the object of each role individually [since the face is visible]. Although it is not possible to imitate any particular individual countenance in performance, actors sometimes alter their own ordinary facial expressions in an attempt to create some particular effect. The results are always without interest. The performance should rather be constructed from the movements and general feeling of the person being portrayed. The actor must always use his own natural facial expressions and never try to alter them.



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### *Roles of Gods*

In general, this kind of Role Playing is related to that appropriate for the demon roles. As the appearance of such a figure is always fierce, no particular difficulties are created by playing the part in the manner of a demon, depending, of course, on the role of the god involved. However, there is one essential difference between the two types of characters. Dancelike gestures are the most appropriate for the role of a god, but they are not suitable for a demon role. Particularly in the case of a god role, the only means available to the actor to represent such a being lies in his being properly dressed, and therefore he must give particular attention to the creation of a properly noble appearance. The actor must decorate his costume correctly and adjust his clothing in an appropriate manner.

### *Demon Roles*

These roles are a particular specialty of the Yamato school. They are extremely difficult to perform successfully. True, it is simple to play effectively the demon roles of vengeful ghosts or possessed beings, as they offer visible elements of interest that can make them arresting. The performer, directing himself toward his acting partner, should use small foot and hand motions and make his movements in accordance with the effect created by his headgear. In the case of a real demon from hell, however, even if the actor studies well, his performance is likely to be merely frightening. There are no real means to make such roles truly enjoyable for the spectators. In fact, these are such difficult roles to play that there are few actors who can perform them in an effective way, it seems.

The essence of such roles lies in forcefulness and frightfulness. Yet such qualities do not stimulate feelings of enjoyment. For this reason, the role of a demon is particularly difficult to play. Logically, the harder the actor tries to perform them, the less interesting they become. The essence of such a role is frightfulness, yet the qualities of frightfulness and enjoyment



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hours of *yang* produces that sought-for harmony. The creation of this harmony is the first step in producing a successful *nō* performance. Performers and spectators alike will find such a performance moving.

On the other hand, the spirit of the night is represented by the negative principle, *yin*. Therefore, the *nō* must be played as buoyantly as possible; what lifts the feelings of the audience is the positive principle, *yang*. Success comes from harmonizing the spirit of *yang* with the spirit of *yin* of night. On the other hand, if the spirit of *yang* is applied to *yang*, or the spirit of *yin* to *yin*, no harmonization can take place, and no success will be forthcoming. And without such a harmony, such a fulfillment, there will be nothing of interest in the performance.

Then too, sometimes even during the daytime, on certain occasions, for some reason or other, the audience may seem dejected and somehow sad; therefore the actors, sensing the negative *yin* principle at work, must give no impression of gloom and should perform with all their energies. Although on occasion the negative principle is operative in the daytime, it is quite unlikely that the positive principle will be effective during the evening. Therefore, in attempting to judge the audience before a performance, this principle should be observed.

**QUESTION:** In a *nō* performance, how are the *jo*, *ha*, and *kyū*<sup>9</sup> to be arranged?

**ANSWER:** This is a simple matter. Since the principle of *jo*, *ha*, and *kyū* is universal, it applies as well to *sarugaku*. The par-

<sup>9</sup> These aesthetic units of a *nō* drama may be roughly translated (using Malm's terminology) as Introduction (*jo*), Exposition (*ha*), and Denouement (*kyū*). These three sections move at an ever-increasing pace and form the basic dramatic, rhythmic, and melodic basis of the *nō*. A more literal translation might be "introduction" (*jo*), "breaking" (*ha*), and "rapid" (*kyū*), suggesting some of these performance elements. There is no set of English terms that can encompass all these meanings, and so they have been left in the original in the translation.





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skillful player who does continue to perfect himself will retain his Flower, even though his skills may decline. If this Flower can be retained, then there will always remain something moving in an actor's performances. As for an artist in whom the true Flower remains, no young actor, no matter who he may be, can win over him.

**QUESTION:** There are various possible strong points in *nō* performances, yet performers who are in general markedly inferior will sometimes be extremely skillful in one aspect of their art. In spite of this, superior performers do not copy them. Is this because they cannot? Or because they feel they should not?

**ANSWER:** In any aspect of life, when it comes to special skills, there are those who have been born with them. Even a player who has been ranked as quite skillful will not be able to accomplish certain things. Such is the judgment that might be rendered concerning an ordinarily gifted player. On the other hand, an actor who has truly mastered the art and skills of the *nō* can surely manifest any aspect of his art. Of course there is only one such artist in a thousand. This is because the others have not mastered such techniques and remain self-satisfied.

In any case, even the most skillful player may show some defects, while even the most clumsy will show some good points. There are few spectators who can make these distinctions. And the actors themselves do not take cognizance of them. The skillful player, resting on his reputation and deceived by his successes, does not take notice of them. An unskilled player, as he has never learned his art, does not recognize his bad points. If, occasionally, he does something in an effective manner, he will not realize what he has accomplished. Thus all actors, skilled and unskilled alike, must consult others about their performances. In order to truly master the art and skills of the *nō*, one must know both one's own abilities and shortcomings.



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without elegance as strong and a performance that shows Grace as weak. There are actors who, regardless of the style adopted, never seem to give a threadbare performance. Such are the strong performers. Those actors who, in spite of their strength, never fail to reveal something colorful and elegant about themselves possess Grace. After all, if an actor has mastered the means to realize his text and to fuse music and movement, he will have learned how to give a strong performance and how to give that performance the quality of Grace as well. He will truly be a masterful performer.

**QUESTION:** In the common language of artistic criticism, the term Bending is often used. What does the term mean?

**ANSWER:** The term is almost impossible to explain in writing. No explanation can capture its beauty. Nevertheless, such an artistic element certainly does exist. Such beauty can grow only after the actor's own Flower is well established. If one examines the matter closely, it can be seen that Bending is hard to grasp through rehearsal and difficult to manifest through any particular means of performance. To manifest Bending, one must first grasp the extremity of the Flower.

Therefore, an actor who has truly identified one aspect of the Flower, even though he has not mastered every form of Role Playing, may be able to grasp the beauty of Bending. Indeed, this quality can be said to exist at a stage even higher than that of the Flower. Without the Flower, Bending has no meaning. Without the Flower, the effect of Bending is merely gloomy and grey. The Bending of a flower in full bloom is truly beautiful. Yet how can the Bending of trees without blossom attract any interest? The crucial element to master is the Flower; then, on top of that, one must master the beauty of Bending. To give an example of this quality is not easy.

An old poem says:<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The poem, by Fujiwara Kiyosuke (1104-1177) is included in the imperial anthology the *Shinkokinshū* (compiled 1206) in the autumn poems (no. 340).



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beginning of *sarugaku*. There are doubtless other particulars remaining about this in other secret writings.

In the country of the Buddha, a wealthy man named Sudatta had built a Buddhist place of retreat, the Jetavana Monastery.<sup>18</sup> At the dedication ceremonies, the Buddha preached a sermon. Devadatta<sup>19</sup> and a throng of unbelievers cried out and danced wildly, holding branches and bamboo grass in which they had placed *shide*, making it more difficult for the Buddha to carry out the ceremony. The Buddha then signaled his disciple Śāriputra with his eye; and Śāriputra, through the power of the master, had the idea of arranging for flute and drum music to be played at the rear entrance to the hall. Then three of the disciples—the learned Ānanda, the wise Śāriputra, and the eloquent Pūrṇa<sup>20</sup>—performed sixty-six entertainments. The heretics, listening to the sound of flute and drum, assembled at the rear entrance and fell silent observing the spectacle. During this time, the Buddha was able to continue on with the dedication service. Such were the beginnings of our art in India.

In our own country, during the reign of the Emperor Kimmēi [A.D. 509-571], on an occasion when the Hatsuse River in Yamato overflowed its banks, a jar floated down in the current. A high court official picked up the jar near the cedar gate of the Miwa Shrine.<sup>21</sup> Inside was a young child. His face was gentle, and he was like a jewel. Because the infant seemed to have descended from heaven, the incident was reported to the emperor at the imperial palace. That very night, the child appeared to the emperor in a dream and said, “I am the reborn

<sup>18</sup> Sudatta was a rich man who devoted himself to the Buddha. He constructed the Jetavana monastery for him, where the Buddha remained for more than twenty years.

<sup>19</sup> Devadatta was a cousin of the Buddha who, although at first a follower, later turned against the Buddha and attempted to have him killed.

<sup>20</sup> Three of the “ten great disciples” of Buddha. Śāriputra was the guiding spirit of the early Buddhist monastic order, Ānanda was known for his wisdom, and Pūrṇa for his eloquence.

<sup>21</sup> One of the most sacred Shintō shrines in Japan. The site is approximately eleven miles from the city of Nara.



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by Prince Shōtoku himself, a portrait of the god of Kasuga Shrine, and bones from the Buddha's own body.

In our present generation [as concerns performances related to religious observances], when the *yuimae* service<sup>33</sup> is performed at the Kōfukuji temple in Nara, the service proper is held in the lecture hall, while *ennen* dances are performed in the dining hall. The dances calm those who do not believe and pacify the devils. During this time, in front of the dining hall, a lecture is given on the *Vimalakīrti sutra*.<sup>34</sup> This practice is based on the ancient example of the Jetavana monastery.

In Yamato province, religious rites of the Kōfukuji Temple and the Kasuga shrines are held on the second and fifth day of the second month. Four *sarugaku* troupes perform at these ceremonies that mark the beginning of the year's religious observances. The performances serve as prayers for the peace of the whole country.

The various companies are as follows:

1. The four troupes that perform at religious functions of the Kasuga Shrine in Yamato: Tobi, Yūzaki, Sakado, Enman-i.<sup>35</sup>
2. The three troupes that perform at religious functions of the Hie Shrine in Ōmi: Yamashina, Shimosaka, and Hie.<sup>36</sup>
3. The two troupes of *shushi* that perform at Ise.
4. The three troupes that perform services at the beginning

<sup>33</sup> A seven-day ceremonial reading of the *Vimalakīrti sutra* (Japanese, *Yui-makyō*) held during October at the Kōfukuji on a regular basis since the ninth century. For details of the service, see various entries in M. W. de Visser, *Ancient Buddhism in Japan*.

<sup>34</sup> This sutra eulogizes Buddha's lay disciple Vimalakīrti, who, while remaining a householder, achieved a greater degree of enlightenment than others who undertook monastic discipline. See Robert Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976).

<sup>35</sup> Tobi is the old name for the present Hōshō troupe. Yūzaki is the former name of the Kanze troupe. Sakado is the old name for the present Kongō troupe. Enman-i is the former name for the Komparu troupe.

<sup>36</sup> The three important troupes of Ōmi *sarugaku*.



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elements that make a performer good, and thereby learn to appreciate him, nevertheless a truly gifted player, if he really makes use of all his artistic skill, should be able to move even an indiscriminating audience. An actor who has truly mastered such skills and the real secrets of his art can be said to have achieved his Flower. One who has reached this rank, no matter what his age, will never be found inferior to an actor who merely displays the temporary Flower of youth. An actor at this higher level of proficiency will be respected everywhere, even by those in the countryside and in the far-off provinces. Such a player will be able to perform ably in the style of Yamato and Ōmi *sarugaku*, and even in the style of *dengaku*, depending on the wishes of his audience. It is in order to make those principles clear that I have written this account.

On the other hand, if an actor is inattentive concerning the fundamental principles relating to his own basic style of acting, then how can his performance possess any genuine life of its own? Such an actor will be a weak and unreliable player. An actor who has a sure sense of his own fundamental style, however, will understand the other styles as well. An actor who thinks to know every style without mastering his own will not only fail to grasp the fundamentals of his own proper art but will certainly fail to understand any of the others. He will be a weak performer and will not maintain his Flower for long. Failing to maintain the Flower can thus be compared to having no deep knowledge of any style. That is why I wrote previously that only after an actor “will have practiced assiduously and mastered all the necessary techniques . . . will he be able to grasp the principle of a flower that does not fade.”

#### *Certain Additional Secret Observations*

It can be said that the purpose of the art of the *nō* is to serve as a means to pacify people's hearts and to move the high and the low alike, which brings prosperity to all of us and promotes a long life. Any act, when pursued to its highest level of attainment, can have the effect of increasing longevity and



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makes use of such elegant expressions, his demeanor will of itself, surprisingly enough, seem to possess the artistic qualities of Grace. Words that give a stiff impression make a performance difficult. Still, although such stiff speeches may be hard for an audience to follow, there are times when they can be effective. The situation depends on the nature of the central character in the play. Proper usage will depend on distinctions in the story concerning the characters involved, be they Chinese or Japanese. In any case, any vulgar expressions will make a play lose its artistic merit.

To repeat: a successful play of the first rank is based on an authentic source, reveals something unusual in aesthetic qualities, has an appropriate climax, and shows Grace. A play of the second rank may not possess any unusual aesthetic qualities, but it will not be overly complex, will be simple to comprehend, and will possess some moments of real interest. Roughly, such is the means by which plays can be ranked. Still, whatever the level of the play itself, as long as it exhibits a particular atmosphere that the actor can use as the basis for his performance, there will be something noteworthy in the results. When performing a play again and again, or on occasions when performances continue on for several days, then even if the text is not a good one, the play will appear to be of interest as long as a way can be found to renew the conception and make it more colorful in performance. Therefore, the success of *nō* depends as well on the occasion when it is performed and on its place in the program. An actor should not abandon a text merely because he does not find it effective. Everything depends on the care taken by the *shite*.

One caution, however: there are certain kinds of plays that are altogether unsuitable. Even though one may say that any kind of Role Playing is possible, there are certain situations that are unplayable, such as incidents in which nuns, old women, or venerable priests are portrayed as deranged or excessively angry. Then again, a character who is to show rage cannot be portrayed in the style of Grace. Such plays represent truly improper *nō*, and these works can be said to misrepresent the



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must depart to some extent from a strict representation of that forceful quality and shift his performance in the direction of Grace. The playwright as well must keep this situation in mind. In other words, the writer must think carefully and choose materials that will create the sensation of Grace and so make the spirit and the text of his play as beautiful as he can. If this is done as faithfully as possible, then the actor performing the play will seem to have created the feeling of Grace quite naturally. Thus if the fundamental principles of what constitutes Grace are firmly grasped, then the principles of a strong performance will be clear as well. If an actor carries out his representation of a properly conceived text, his audience will feel at ease and not on edge. Such a quality assures a strong performance.

Then too, the slight differences in the sounds of words in the text are most important: for example, words such as *nabiki* (waving or fluttering), *fusu* (to lie down), *kaeru* (to draw back), *yoru* (to come close), and so forth have a soft sound and seem of themselves to create a sense of gracefulness. On the other hand, words like *otsuru* (to fall down), *kuzururu*, (to crumble), *yabururu* (to break), *marobu* (to knock down) have a strong sound and require forceful gestures. Thus it can be understood that the qualities referred to as strength and Grace are not totally distinct and separate but rise from a fidelity to the object of the role being portrayed, while weakness and roughness indicate a divergence from that ideal.

Keeping these principles in mind, the writer, when composing his opening lines, the *issei*, or the *waka* section should, because of the nature of the role being created, attempt to create an atmosphere of Grace and suggestiveness; he will make an error if he attempts to introduce any harsh words, odd expressions, Sanskrit words,<sup>40</sup> or words to be pronounced in the Chinese fashion.<sup>41</sup> If such words are accompanied with

<sup>40</sup> That is, vocabulary taken from the sutras or mystical Buddhist incantations (*dhārani*).

<sup>41</sup> That is, the pronunciation of Chinese characters in a fashion using a Japanese version of Chinese pronunciation used during the Han Dynasty (202



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various persons. This is perhaps a matter that each should decide for himself.

## CHAPTER 7. A SEPARATE SECRET TEACHING

In this secret teaching, I wish to explain how to understand of what the Flower consists. First of all, one must understand the conception that, just as a flower can be observed blooming in nature, the flower can be used as well as a metaphor for all things in the *nō*.

When speaking of flowers, in all their myriad varieties, it can be said that they will bloom at their appointed time during the four seasons; and because they always seem fresh and novel when they bloom at that appointed season, they are highly appreciated. In performing *sarugaku* as well, when this art appears novel to the spectators, they will be moved to find it attractive. Flower, charm and novelty: all three of these partake of the same essence. There is no flower that remains and whose petals do not scatter. And just because the petals scatter, then, when the flower blooms again, it will seem fresh and novel. An understanding of the principle of the Flower explains why in the *nō* there does not exist that stagnation that results from the monotony of any single means of expression. As the *nō* does not always remain the same, various new aesthetic qualities can be emphasized, bringing a sense of novelty.

However, one note of caution is necessary. When one speaks of “novelty,” the term does not necessarily refer to some means of artistic expression that never existed before. After thoroughly mastering all the various principles that have been set down in these *Teachings on Style and the Flower*, an actor, thinking to perform a play, can show as the occasion demands the various arts that he has mastered. To cite again the example of flowers, among all growing things, there are no special flowers that bloom out of their appointed seasons. In the same way, if an actor masters the various elements of *nō* that he has learned to remember, he can show his art, basing



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responding, and his gestures and movements as well will follow an instant after. Such movements surely represent the best way to show the character of an old person. Keeping this concern in mind, the role must otherwise be performed with the kind of expansiveness that an old man would wish to show. It can be said that, above all else, an old person wants to appear young. Yet he can do nothing about the fact that his limbs are heavy and he is hard of hearing, so that, although he may still be quick of spirit, his physical movements cannot keep pace. Knowing this principle represents true Role Playing. One should basically play the role in a youthful manner such as that which an old person would wish to assume. In this way the actor can show through his performance the envy the old feel for the young. An elderly person, no matter how youthfully he wishes to dance, will not, in principle, be able to keep up with the beat of the music. Here, for the spectator, the sense of novelty comes from the fact that an old person dances like a young one. This is a flower blooming on an ancient tree.

An actor must absorb all styles of acting. An actor who can manage all styles of expression will require a certain time before he can perform them all, and he will thus be able to create a continuous impression of novelty. One who has truly grasped the various styles can summon up his art to color them and expand upon them a hundredfold. An actor should plan to repeat himself only once in a three- to five-year period, so as to create a sense of novelty for his audiences. This technique will give an actor a great sense of ease. In addition, during the course of the year, the actor must keep in mind the plays appropriate to each season. Also, in a sequential performance of *sarugaku* that extends over several days, the various styles of acting must be alternated and colored not only on each day but throughout the whole program. Thus if one concentrates naturally on all aspects of our art, from the most fundamental principles to the smallest details, there will be no danger of losing the Flower throughout one's career.

Then too it has been said that, more important than learning

the myriad styles of expression, an actor must not forget the Flower that he has established at various phases of his career. These various Flowers, past and future, make up the various elements of one's acting style. By "past and future" I mean that the various styles that an actor has naturally mastered at various times, such as his presence as a child actor, his art as a young adult, and his elaborate skill as a mature actor, as well as his technique as an older performer, should all form a part of his art. Sometimes it should appear as though his performance were that of a child, sometimes of a youth; then again, on occasion like that of an actor at the height of his power, or again, like an actor who has in his maturity thoroughly mastered his art. In other words, the actor must perform so that it appears as though he were not the same person in each role. That is, he must hold to the idea that, within his accomplishment at any given time, there must lie an art ranging from that of a child to that of an old man. So it is that one can speak of a Flower drawn from past and future.

However, no one has ever seen or heard of such a supremely gifted artist from the beginnings of our art down to the present day. Perhaps only my father Kan'ami, during the vigor of his youth, played in the kind of polished style capable of giving his spectators that kind of satisfaction, or so I have heard. I myself witnessed his performances when he was about forty, and I have no doubt about it. In performing the play *Jinen Koji*, when he played one particular scene on a dais, people who saw him at the time were convinced that he had the appearance of a youth of sixteen or seventeen: such was his reputation. As many said that this was true, and as I myself witnessed his performances, I can say that he really did achieve this level of excellence. Yet how rare is the actor who, in this way, can learn as a youth the styles of acting he would later use, and who, as a mature artist, never manages to forget the styles he mastered as a youth. I have never seen or heard of another.

Again, an actor must never forget the aspects of his art that he has learned from his beginnings as an actor, so that, in





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short time, so that fortune switches again and again from one side to the other; thus, if an actor is convinced that his turn will come, he will be able to perform with confidence. Such is the Law of Cause and Effect in performance. An actor must never be remiss in pondering over this truth. Remember the expression “to him who believes accrues virtue.”<sup>44</sup>

If the matter is examined thoroughly, however, it can be said that, after all, the Law of Cause and Effect or a good or bad occasion can be reduced to the matter of novelty or a lack of novelty. If a spectator sees the same actor in the same play for two days in succession, what he found effective the day before will now seem uninteresting. This is because the spectator has a memory of something novel, which, since he does not find it again on the second day, makes him feel the performance is unsatisfactory. Later, however, on another occasion, he will go to the play with the memory of an unsatisfactory performance, and as he will now discover something new, he will find the performance successful.

Thus, when an artist masters our art to the highest degree, he finds that the Flower as such does not exist as a separate entity. When all the secret mysteries of the *nō* have been penetrated, it can be seen that Flower exists only to the extent that the actor has a firm self-understanding of the principle of novelty in all things. As the sutra says, “good and bad alike are undifferentiated; wickedness and righteousness are the same.”<sup>45</sup> It is not true that, fundamentally, there is nothing fixed concerning good or bad? Rather, depending on the occasion, what is useful is good, and what is not useful is bad. Our art depends on the taste of the audience at a particular time and place and will be produced in response to the general taste of the time. Such is the Flower that is truly useful. Here, one kind of performance is appreciated; there, another sort of acting is welcomed. The Flower thus must differ depending

<sup>44</sup> No particular source is cited for this maxim.

<sup>45</sup> Scholars have not agreed on the exact source for this quotation, which appeared in other Japanese medieval texts as well. Similar sentiments are expressed in the Vimalakīrti sutra.



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their training with the Two Basic Arts and Three Role Types will only succeed in committing themselves to the creation of mere scattered elements in their Role Playing, trees and leaves without any trunk. Yet the elegant beauty of the child performer does remain in the Three Role Types of the mature performer, and the skill arising from a mastery of the Three Role Types can permit the actor to manifest his own vision, no matter what the play.

## 2. *An Art That Remains External*

In terms of the *nō*, art that remains External is to be despised. This point must be fully understood. First, if an actor is born with the proper natural character, and gifted with talent, he can surely become a master. As he polishes and practices his art, his natural abilities will manifest themselves of their own accord.

In terms of dancing and chanting, an actor has not yet achieved a fluent mastery at the stage when he is still imitating what he has learned from his teacher. On the surface, the imitation may be effective, but he will not yet have assimilated the art unto himself, his artistic powers will be insufficient, and his real skill in *nō* will not increase—such is the actor who remains at the level of Externalization. A real master is one who imitates his teacher well, shows discernment, assimilates his art, absorbs his art into his mind and in his body, and so arrives at a level of Perfect Fluency through a mastery of his art. A performance by such an actor will show real life. An actor who adds strength to his natural abilities through constant practice and rehearsal, understands quickly, and puts himself totally into the object of his role is one who can truly be said to have achieved Internalization. To repeat again, a performer must truly grasp the distinction between true mastery and its opposite. “To do something is not hard; but to do it well is very difficult indeed.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Zeami's text attributes the text to Mencius, where it does not appear. A



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"Zeami's treatises on the art of Nō rank among the finest of all writings on the theatre. Though specifically devoted to the drama of a particular place and time—Japan in the early fifteenth century—they contribute to an understanding of the dramatic arts of the world. The texts make absorbing reading, but they are difficult in the original, even for specialists. We are fortunate that two authorities on the Japanese theatre, a Japanese and an American, have combined forces to translate and present Zeami's most significant works."

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Cover photograph: a scene from *Yūgao* by Zeami.

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